



Scrutiny Review of Planning Services

**Report by the Planning
Service Scrutiny Review
Group
March 2009**

**For presentation to the Environment
Scrutiny Committee 20 April 2009**

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF PLANNING SERVICES

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Environment Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 31st March 2008, briefly considered a suggestion made by the Cabinet Member (Environment & Strategic Housing) that a Scrutiny review be undertaken into the Planning Service.
- 1.2. Environment Scrutiny Committee on 9th June 2008 considered a report highlighting that while the Planning Service had enjoyed wide ranging success in recent years, the challenge for the future was to respond locally to the national Planning Reform agenda. At the heart of this is the move from land use to a spatial planning system as the Council rolls out the Local Development Framework and delivers the new Growth Points agenda.
- 1.3. The Committee considered and agreed the terms of reference (the key lines of enquiry) for the Scrutiny review namely:
 - How best can the Planning function deliver the growth required up to 2026?
 - How can the Local Development Framework best be integrated with the Growth Points agenda?
 - How will the Planning Service contribute to the regeneration of the County in general and to the provision of infrastructure in particular?
 - Does the Planning Service have the capacity and the financial resources to deliver the wider agenda?
 - How best can planning policies be implemented through the development management function?
 - How effective are relationships between officers, members and parish / town councils?
 - What work needs to be done to develop processes that support and enable good communications and relationships to be established and maintained?
 - What service delivery arrangements will assist in the ongoing modernisation of the service?
- 1.4. The Committee also agreed the membership of the Review Group namely Councillors: PA Andrews (Chair); CM Bartrum; WLS Bowen; PM Morgan; PJ Watts JB Williams and RI Matthews (ex-officio as Chair of Environment Scrutiny Committee).
- 1.5. The review was undertaken between 9th July 2008 and March 2009 and was supported by Dr T Geeson (Head of Policy and Performance) as lead officer and Mr P James, Democratic Services Officer. Based on the key lines of enquiry, this report summarises the findings of the Review and contains recommendations for the Executive.
- 1.6. The Scrutiny Review Group would like to express its thanks to the people who have presented verbal evidence to the Review Group, the Town and Parish Councils and Councillors who responded to the questionnaire and those who have provided further information and or data as required.

Next Steps

- 1.7. The Review Group anticipate that, when approved by the Environment Scrutiny Committee, this report will be presented to Cabinet for consideration.
- 1.8. The Environment Scrutiny Committee would then expect Cabinet within two months of receipt of the report to consider the report and recommendations and respond to

the Committee indicating what action the Cabinet propose to take together with an action plan.

- 1.9. The Review Group are aware that the Audit Commission are also undertaking a review of certain aspects of Planning Services which may complement the findings of this scrutiny review. Therefore in the interests receiving a complete picture it is anticipated that the report to Environment Scrutiny Committee will also include any recommendations and action plan resulting from that review.

Caveat

- 1.10. When the Scrutiny Review Group met for the first time in July 2008 the issue was the capacity of the Planning Service to address the many aspects of growth facing Herefordshire. Nine months later the service is still addressing long-term growth, but against the background of a recession. While this may free up staff capacity, particularly in development and building control and slow major developments such as the Edgar Street Grid (ESG) it also reduces income significantly. The pressure on resources has changed but continues.

2. Method of Gathering Information

2.1. The Review Group undertook a series of meetings in order to collect the evidence to complete the review. Evidence that was considered included the following:

- **Face to Face interviews** – a series of interviews took place with key Council members and officers and a representative sample of professional service users but not the public. A list of those interviewed is set out at Appendix 1
- **Survey Questionnaires** – survey questionnaires were sent to all Town and Parish Councils and all members of Herefordshire Council
- **Written evidence** - the Review Group considered a range of written evidence to assist their deliberations including:
 - ‘Councillor Involvement in Planning Decisions’ by Communities and Local Government.
 - ‘Area-based decision making (ABDM) for development control; a review by the Planning Advisory Service.
 - ‘Development Control’ and ‘Development Management’ by PJ Yates Development Manager.
 - Various information reports; guidance notes or statistics by: the Head of Planning and Transportation; the Planning Policy Manager; the Management Accounts Manager, and the Lead Officer for the review.

3. Links to the Herefordshire Community Strategy

3.1. The Planning Service supports a number of themes identified in the Herefordshire Community Strategy, the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Corporate Plan through its work in contributing to a safe and pleasant environment to live and work, increasing the availability of affordable housing, protecting the environment and improving access to services.

3.2. The Planning Services is responsible for preparing and implementing all the elements of the Local Development Framework (LDF) in co-operation with other service areas across the Council and its partners. This ensures a consistent approach to overarching themes as climate change, community and social issues, transportation and economic development. An example of the links to the Strategy would be the relationship of the Growth Point agenda/proposed outer distributor road to the LDF.

3.3. The review Group believe the findings contained in this report will help the Service achieve its objectives.

4. How best can the Planning function deliver the growth required up to 2026?

The Planning background

- 4.1. Although growth involves employment land, essential infrastructure etc, we have focussed on the number of new dwellings to be provided. The numbers allocated to Herefordshire are derived from the national housing projections, cascaded regionally and then allocated within the West Midlands. The Council has to comply with regional policy.
- 4.2. In summary the policy background is as follows:
- 4.3. The 2004 regional spatial strategy (RSS) identified five sub-regional foci that could take the growth that the major urban areas of the West Midlands could not. One of these foci was Hereford. The RSS has evolved and in December 2007, the five foci were superseded by ten settlements of significant development (SSD), Hereford is one of these.
- 4.4. Housing numbers were allocated to each SSD by the RSS preferred option in December 2007. In the case of Hereford the allocation was 8,300 new dwellings plus an equal number in the rest of the County. In May 2008 the Planning Committee considered the matter and then Cabinet resolved not to object to a maximum of 16,600 new dwellings up to the year 2026. Cabinet however, only accepted the concentration on Hereford on the understanding that the necessary infrastructure came forward.
- 4.5. Subsequently the maxima was increased by a further 1,200 dwellings in rural areas which was agreed by Cabinet in November 2008. The numbers and distribution of new dwellings are therefore matters of both regional and Council policy. The Secretary of State will take the final decision on the RSS, including housing numbers, later this year after an examination in public.
- 4.6. If provision is not made for the necessary infrastructure, the Review Group expects Cabinet to reconsider the matter.

Local implications

- 4.7. It is important that elected members understand that the new maximum of 17,800 additional dwellings in the County between now and 2026 is not excessive either when compared with the annual rate of completions historically (@830pa.) or the forecast natural growth in population from the Council's own research team.
- 4.8. What is critical are exactly where the dwellings eventually go and the pace at which they are provided. The central issue is how to manage growth and avoid being defensive, even though the longer the recession continues the more likely it becomes that larger and more complex applications will eventually emerge. Currently, neither the Planning Service nor elected members have significant experience of these kinds of application. In addition, the available planning statistics show relatively slow performance on what are currently regarded as major applications.
- 4.9. The Review Group believes that the planning function can best deliver the growth required if:
 - All members of the Council sponsor and promote appropriate growth.
 - Town and Parish Councils and other partner organisations are kept informed and able to make considered contributions to the planning process.

- There is detailed engagement and support from bodies such as the Highways and Environment agencies.
- Planning officers are appropriately trained e.g. on project management and planning performance agreements and
- Local people understand the need for growth and are positively engaged in the planning process.
- Significant shortcomings on any of these points will limit the planning function's future success.

4.10. The Review Group believes that the profile of the service needs to be raised. However, despite representations we are not convinced that a new planning directorate is required to achieve this. The most recent re-organisation, placing the Planning & Transportation service within the Regeneration directorate seems to be wholly positive although it is still relatively early days. The necessary profile will be achieved by the successful delivery of the growth and infrastructure required and through leading the 'place shaping' agenda.

4.11. However we do consider that the way in which the service is currently structured should be examined. Existing team structures, particularly in development and building control, may not be the most effective for the future and actually limit the outcomes and quality achieved. What is required for the future is the flexibility to set up staff groups across teams and disciplines to initiate, manage and deliver specific projects such as the growth point agenda or major applications.

4.12. The Review Group regrets that there is no clear 'master plan' for tackling all the changes facing the service. Without this there is a danger that the service will continue to live from 'hand to mouth'. Such a plan should, for instance, clearly identify the 3, 5 and 10 year implications of change for the service in terms of the capacity and skills of the staff as well as the new processes / ways of working to be adopted and the resources required. Authorities that have already handled significant change, successfully, may provide useful learning in this respect. We understand that Ashford (Kent) and South Cambridgeshire and, more generally, the Beacon Councils may have direct experience and could show Herefordshire how to achieve wide-spread support for the changes underway.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4.A	That the service utilises some of the capacity resulting from the recession to work even more closely with members on the issue of growth in Herefordshire.
4.B	That particular attention, by way of consultation, is given to elected members representing wards in the city and its immediate surrounding parishes given the concentration of new houses in these areas being proposed. However this should not be at the expense of addressing the growth pressures facing the market towns.
4.C	That a master plan be prepared for the service that shows the current challenges, their phasing and the changes needed.
4.D	That the examples of authorities with significant experience in modernising and successfully handling growth be studied and appropriate lessons incorporated into the master plan.
4.E	That a seminar be arranged by the Planning Service that involves representatives from other successful planning authorities so that local councillors in Herefordshire can learn from their experience at first hand and compare the various approaches.
4.F	That a comprehensive consultation plan be developed showing how and when the public of Herefordshire will be involved in the choices facing the County.

5. How can the Local Development Framework (LDF) best be integrated with the Growth Points agenda?

Background

- 5.1. The impact of the LDF must not be underestimated. It is the plan for Herefordshire 2011-2026 and will replace the current Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and almost all other land use plans and policies in the County. For this reason elected members and the public must be given significantly more opportunities than at present to debate and discuss its content before it is finalised.
- 5.2. The Review Group understands that the LDF is a spatial plan dealing with sustainable services and is not a physical land use plan. It places much greater emphasis on work within the Council and between partners to define where services can be supported. The LDF will cover everything of importance: housing, transport, schools, employment land, green spaces etc. Crucially it endeavours to show how all these elements fit together into a strategic option that should result in a better Herefordshire. At the heart of the LDF is the core strategy.
- 5.3. This core strategy – based around the preferred strategic option – will set out what is needed to make Herefordshire a better place in which to live and work and how this will be done. This vision for a better Herefordshire will need to reflect the sustainable community strategy for the County approved by the Herefordshire Partnership as well as the 3 year action plan (local area agreement) designed to make the community strategy a reality. In future all applications for development in Herefordshire will be assessed against the core strategy. This is the greatest challenge for elected members and the Planning Service now and in the future.
- 5.4. The Review Group notes the pressure that the development of the LDF was putting on staff resources during 2008 and was surprised that senior development control staff were not more knowledgeable and involved. Now that there is considerably less pressure within the Development and Building Control teams, the opportunity should be taken to redirect appropriate resources to the LDF. This should help if the same employees have to interpret and implement its provisions in the years ahead.

The current challenge

- 5.5. The Review Group is clear that all elected members need to understand and appreciate the importance of the core strategy much more than they currently appear to do. They need to shape its content and accept the implications of their preferred option for Herefordshire, its people and the elected members of the future. Four different options have now been consulted upon
 - An economic focus;
 - A social focus;
 - An environmental focus; and
 - A housing focus.
- 5.6. A preferred options paper is expected at Cabinet in the summer. Once approval is given, the core strategy based on this option will be finalised and submitted to the Government in the spring of 2010 with an examination in public and adoption anticipated towards the end of 2010. This will replace the current UDP.
- 5.7. The UDP is sometimes the cause of tension within the Council because it is not always owned by current elected members or understood by the public that they

represent. If similar tension is to be minimised in future under the LDF then current elected members need to:

- Be much more familiar with its potential content and timeline for completion.
- Demonstrate much greater interest in strategic planning.
- Be prepared to accept the consequences of their preferred option.

5.8. Elected members generally must understand the differences and similarities of the four options and communicate these clearly to partners, including town and parish councils, and the public. Unless these are achieved, the LDF will not have the clarity of intent at its core that is so essential for the future. Plain English, with the correct use of grammar and punctuation, should be used in all future documentation and consultation exercises along with appropriate charts, diagrams, graphics etc.

5.9. Communications should also be enhanced with the developers themselves. The Review Group commends the initiative taken to establish an ad-hoc agent's forum. However discussions with agents during this review indicate a general lack of awareness of what lies ahead. While understanding why the service is reluctant to discuss potential sites for growth, the Review Group believes that there are many items of joint interest to discuss over and above current issues. The move from development control to development management is a case in point.

The future challenge

5.10. Unlike the UDP, the LDF will not be underpinned by detailed control policies. At present the application of detailed policies can cause frustration. However, the same policies do provide a known structure against which all proposals can be judged.

5.11. In the absence of such detailed policy guidance (e.g. which might not include settlement boundaries) behind the LDF, the source of frustration may shift in future. The acceptability of development proposals will be assessed solely against the broader criteria of the preferred option. That is why member involvement and support for this is crucial.

5.12. Some planning decisions will always be unpopular with sections of the community. However the best way of minimising this is, as noted above, to build interest and support behind the relevant strategic plan and its interpretation, rather than wait for particular 'hard cases' at some point in the future.

5.13. Because the LDF is, arguably, less objective than the current UDP it will reduce some current frustrations (for instance permitting tourism related expansion) but cause others. Members and officers will need training in how to interpret the LDF provisions consistently and sensitively. This training and awareness needs to be extended to parish councils particularly in relation to the future of parish planning. However good this training is, the Review Group are concerned that more appeals / complaints will be generated in future with potentially increased financial consequences.

Growth point agenda

5.14. In October 2006 the Government announced that Hereford was one of around 20 growth points in England. The Review Group's understanding is that, given that housing growth is coming to Herefordshire as a result of the RSS (see section 4 earlier), it made sense to accept growth point status which provided more grant aid towards investigating issues related to that housing.

5.15. However, the initial growth point funding has been used for LDF work along with the now defunct planning delivery grant (PDG). The LDF does not have a budget of its

own and despite the receipt of pump-priming funds for the growth point initiative, work is still needed to identify readily available sites to deliver the anticipated growth. Ideally both projects can be undertaken by any staff re-deployed or from staff vacancies as a result of the recession. The Review Group's view is that the medium term financial management strategy must provide adequate funding. If this is not possible, Cabinet should give clear directions to the Director of Regeneration and the Head of Planning & Transportation about what other activities should be displaced to allow the necessary LDF and growth-point work to proceed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5.A	To ensure more member involvement in the development of the LDF, the Cabinet members' working group should be expanded to include, as a minimum, the chair of the main Planning and Environment Scrutiny Committees. Careful consideration should be given to making the working group all party.
5.B	There should be greater opportunities for all members to discuss the emerging LDF at its formative stages through regular seminars, newsletters etc. Solely using formal Scrutiny or Planning Committee meetings is insufficient for decisions of this magnitude or for members to understand the differences between the choices facing Herefordshire and the consequences of their choices.
5.C	Much greater attention should be given to plainer English, including the correct use of grammar and punctuation, and such devices as diagrams, graphics, charts in all communications concerning the LDF. The widely circulated developing options paper is overly complex.
5.D	A clear timeline for member involvement in the developing LDF should be produced and regularly updated.
5.E	The future purpose and contribution of parish planning to the LDF process needs to be discussed and agreed with Town and Parish councils so that they too can understand the choices ahead and the differences between them.
5.F	That the LDF and the growth point initiative should be funded at an appropriate level until complete.
5.G	That a structured programme of communications be commenced with developers / agents.

6. How will the Planning Service contribute to the regeneration of the County in general and to the provision of infrastructure in particular?

6.1. To some extent this general question is answered in other sections of the report. However, to re-iterate the service needs to:

- move to being a development management function rather than separate Development Control, Forward Planning etc teams;
- develop its project management skills;
- engage even more effectively with members, business groups: Town and Parish Councils, and the public;
- be seen as the deliverer of key Council objectives i.e. an enabling not a policing service.

6.2. In addition to these general points the Review Group did consider the proportionality of the paperwork required by applicants. No final views were reached, but it goes without saying that the burdens on any applicant should be minimised consistent with the need to provide good professional advice to members. i.e. is easy to use and is a cost effective service that minimises delays and delivers the required outcomes.

6.3. The service's other critical contribution to the regeneration of Herefordshire and the provision of infrastructure is to ensure that all sections of the Council and its partners are clear about the infrastructure required in the future. At present the process of consulting individual services, largely on the basis of individual applications or in relation to specific S106 agreements seems rather ad-hoc to the Review Group. All parts of the council and our partners, including parish councils, need to work together to maximise benefits of the spatial planning process. Bringing these interested parties together should be led by the Planning Service. Generally:

- services need educating to provide comments on individual applications that are in accord with planning criteria;
- services need to understand what can be provided by S106 agreements and provide consistent evidence for their requirements;
- there needs to be a ward by ward data base of costed infrastructure requirements based on council or partners plans and members priorities.

RECOMMENDATION

6.A	Consideration should be given to establishing an all-authority infrastructure group under the Head of Planning and Transportation. The purpose of this group is to ensure that all future infrastructure requirements throughout the County are identified and quantified in a structured way. In order to do this the group will need to involve partner organisations, parish councils etc.
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7. Does the Planning Service have the capacity and the financial resources to deliver the wider agenda?

Current performance

7.1. The Review Group regards the Planning Service as an important front-line service that should provide first class services. It is not a failing service and can, in our view, continue to improve. In summary according to CIPFA statistics:

- Herefordshire is the second largest unitary council in England, approximately three times larger than the third placed council. Both its geographical size and its sparsity have implications for the delivery of a planning service.
- Expenditure on planning policy is relatively low historically.
- Expenditure on development control is relatively high historically.
- As far as staff numbers are concerned, Herefordshire ranks 14th out of 33 unitary authorities for planning policy staff and 7th out of 33 for building control staff. Vacancies are not unusual in any authority.
- Herefordshire was the 4th busiest unitary planning service in 2007 also having large numbers of alleged breaches of planning consents and enforcement notices / injunctions.

7.2. Performance measured by the former best value indicators (BVPI's) of the length of time taken to determine major, minor and 'other' planning applications has improved over the last three years but is now falling and is below the internal targets set. As reported to the Planning Committee on 11 November 2008 the number of successful appeals against refusals of planning permissions has risen to a point where the Audit Commission are concerned. In 2007/08 over half of these successful appeals related to member refusals of permission against officer recommendations. There has been a significant reduction in the number of planning complaints considered by the Local Government Ombudsman.

Capacity

7.3. The Review Group notes the Head of Planning and Transportation's opinion at the start of this review that he did not have the resources necessary especially in Development Control. At that stage it was reported that each Development Control Officer handled approximately 190 applications a year against what might be regarded as a professional norm of 150. The Review Group also noted the growing pressure from ESG and the LDF. Major consultations (e.g. on the core strategy) or applications that attract public interest (e.g. wind-farms) do cause staff to be diverted from other tasks to deal with peak workloads. Despite this, no figures were ever provided to indicate the potential shortfall in capacity and the Review Group is surprised at the lack of clarity about what the changes facing the Planning Service would mean for employee numbers and competencies.

7.4. However the recession has changed the position. Planning applications and income (from fees immediately and potentially via S106 in the longer term) have dropped dramatically. In only six months the concern has gone from 'do we have sufficient planning officers to cater for the anticipated growth' to one where other authorities are reported to be making planning staff redundant. We need to ensure value for money. Therefore, in terms of local capacity the first thing to do is explore how the staff affected by the declining workload can be redeployed and, if necessary trained and developed, into the roles still required. This should mitigate against future recruitment difficulties in planning after the recession as suitable trained staff have, in the past, proved hard to retain and recruit.

- 7.5. The Review Group believes that in addition to the necessary professional development to cope with the transfer from UDP to LDF, key skills for the future include:
- Communications and consultation.
 - Presentation.
 - Partnership working.
 - Community development.
 - Political sensitivity.
 - Negotiation.
- 7.6. These skills should be identified in person specifications in future and staff trained in them now.

Financial resources

- 7.7. The Review Group notes that 2007-08 was the first year, recently, that the service has over spent (@£418k). The main elements were the costs of document scanning, consultancy fees, legal costs and a shortfall of income. We understand that there are currently no plans to increase the base budget.
- 7.8. Other local authorities have apparently invested pump-priming funds (such as PDG or growth point money) and their own funds to manage the introduction of the growth agenda. In contrast Herefordshire has used PDG and any excess income over targets to fund the LDF and match overspends on consultants (e.g. on wind-farms and major housing schemes) or legal fees when defending contested planning decisions. As previously noted there has been little progress on growth point research as a result. The recent, significant, decline in income has made the financial situation of the Planning Service even less stable than it was.
- 7.9. The Review Group is clear that the planning service cannot possibly balance its budget during 2008-09. The shortfall in income will have to be addressed by Joint Management Team (JMT) and, ultimately, Cabinet on a corporate basis consistent with other, similarly affected income streams.
- 7.10. There are future cost savings from the introduction of modern ICT and potentially project working. Other planning authorities must face the need to pay for major consultation exercises, significant consultancy fees and legal costs. The practice in other high performing authorities should be established. Subject to this, the Review Group considers a budget should be provided for these purposes. If this principle is established it could be funded by top-slicing income when this returns to levels over the relevant targets. However, these will inevitably have to be adjusted downwards so that for at least the next two years any budget will require funding from corporate sources. The budget should be under the control of the Director of Resources and be the subject of bids from the service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7.A	Performance targets that show year on year improvements in performance should be set with the aim of the service being consistently in the top quartile of comparable authorities. These should be reviewed regularly to ensure value for money and high quality services are provided.
7.B	Employees whose workload has declined recently should be considered for redeployment (with training as necessary) into those longer-term projects that were in danger of being short of resources prior to the recession.
7.C	The way in which other high performing planning authorities fund consultation exercises, consultancy fees and legal expenses be established.

7.D	Subject to the previous recommendation, a contingency budget should be established to provide limited funding for major consultations, specialist consultants or legal fees. Access to any such budget should be controlled by the Director of Resources.
7.E	The Head of Planning and Transportation should examine the balance between expenditure on planning policy and development control within the service to ensure it is correct for all future requirements.

8. How best can planning policies be implemented through the development management function?

- 8.1. It is clear that the Development Control function will be most affected when the LDF becomes the new planning framework for Herefordshire and the recession ends, potentially producing an increased number of major / more complex planning applications. What is less obvious is that there needs to be a greater degree of co-ordination between the policy formulator (Cabinet and those that advise them) and those involved in the determination of planning applications (Planning Committees and officers under delegated powers).
- 8.2. While development management will be the major area of impact, the service as a whole, needs to shift from controlling to managing development. Technically competent employees need to develop to see 'the bigger picture' driven by the core strategy that individual applications contribute to and need to be judged against.
- 8.3. A useful table has been provided by the service (Appendix 2) to explain the nature of the change from controlling to managing development. This is worthy of more detailed discussion between officers and elected members. It is essential that elected members fully understand the future position. Such follow up work should be costed and programmed.
- 8.4. Under development management, planning policies can best be developed if the initial process to approve the LDF and the follow up work address as many as possible of the normal development issues in advance of any planning application.
- 8.5. The Review Group accepts that this will mean amongst other things:
- Major partners such as the environment agency and water authorities becoming partners not consultees.
 - Town and Parish councils becoming 'bidders' for services / growth and champions for schemes rather than foci for objections.
 - More structured and consistent consultations in the locality of applications.
- 8.6. The Review Group agrees with the Head of Planning and Transportation that a key indicator of success in the future will be the lack of objections received since all significant issues have been addressed and explained prior to the application.
- 8.7. It goes without saying that employees, members, the development industry, town and parish councils and the public need to understand the changes underway much more comprehensively than they do at present. A comprehensive programme of training and awareness events will be required in the next 18 months.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8.A	The Head of Planning and Transportation should prepare a costed and timed programme for the work necessary to address the major planning issues raised during the LDF process.
8.B	The Head of Planning and Transportation should prepare and roll-out a comprehensive programme to explain development management to members, developers, town and parish councils and the public.
8.C	Staff are trained, as necessary, in the changed requirements of development management.

9. How effective are relationships between officers, members and parish / town councils?

9.1. We will deal with each of these groups in turn although there are obvious links between them all. The Scrutiny Review Group wishes to record its thanks to the Council's Research team. It developed, conducted and analysed the surveys of Herefordshire councillors and parish clerks, who were requested to respond on behalf of their council, upon which much of this section is based. The results, including 'free text' comments are at Appendix 3 & 4.

9.2. Response rates were 50% for councillors and 48% for parish clerks. These are excellent for surveys of this sort. The Review Group wish to thank all those concerned, but are disappointed that only half of the Council could find time to express their views on such an important subject. While the results are certainly sufficient to produce statistically valid conclusions, the Review Group would have wished that more of their colleagues had responded on an issue that affects all members of the Council.

Relationships between officers and members

9.3. Those officers with whom we discussed this issue believe that there are generally good professional arrangements and good working relationships. From the member perspective, as the survey results show (Appendix 3), 90% of those who responded i.e. 26 of the 29 were satisfied with their working relationship with the Planning Service. The Review Group believes that this is a good indication of a fundamentally effective relationship.

Relationships between officers and town / parish councils

9.4. As the survey results show (Appendix 4), responses were received from 64 of Herefordshire's 134 town and parish councils (48%). Of these, 79% felt that they were adequately informed about planning applications and 81% were satisfied with their working relationship with the Planning Service. When asked about planning officers attending meetings, the preference was on request (47 responses) and / or for complex issues (34 responses). As this particular question was multiple choice, there is clearly some overlap between the two responses.

9.5. While Herefordshire Council has targets for the time taken to approve applications, one potential area for improvement is to take more account of the cycle of town and parish council meetings.

9.6. The Review Group considers that the current Parish Compact will need reviewing in light of the LDF. The compact is intended to guide the relationship between the county and parish councils, including their respective roles in spatial planning. These roles will clearly change as the LDF replaces the UDP.

Relationships between the Council and agents

9.7. The Review Group deliberately sought the views of those involved in the development industry in Hereford. Officers had already taken the initiative and convened meetings of a voluntary agents' panel to discuss matters of mutual interest. The Review Group commends this initiative. The officers believe the relationship is working well overall. Member direct contact with agents is, understandably, limited, but it does appear to the Review Group that agents regard neither officers nor members particularly positively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9.A	Planning staff should take account of the committee cycles of town and parish councils when seeking their views on local applications.
9.B	That the Parish Compact be reconsidered in light of the emerging LDF.
9.C	Consideration should be given to placing an agents panel on a formal basis.
9.4	That member guidance and training continues to emphasise the need for appropriate speech and behaviour to officers.
9.D	That any formal agents panel present a report on its deliberations to the Environment Scrutiny Committee e.g annually.

10. What work needs to be done to develop processes that support and enable good communications and relationships to be established and maintained?

10.1. The Review Group considered this question from a number of perspectives. Considerable time was spent on S106 funding which might now be somewhat academic during the current recession. The Review Group notes that the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee (21 November 2008) has also received a report on this topic.

S106

10.2. The Review Group's recommendations are set out below. A number relate to the current lack of clarity about this source of funding.

10.3. The Review Group notes the following views from agents:

- The amounts sought appear inconsistent and there is no tariff.
- The Council needs to be better at pulling together and making sense of all the bids produced. This can appear disorganised and may be wasting officer time and effort. (Recommendation 6.1 refers).
- There is potentially an adverse affect on small developments. (S106 agreements are not limited to large developments, but are also applied to single property developments).
- The recession may result in applications being resubmitted to avoid payments agreed at the height of the market.

10.4. The Review Group also supports the intentions of the Head of Planning and Transportation to appoint a Section 106 Officer.

Members

10.5. There is a general dissatisfaction with the limits on member involvement in the early stages of major development in their wards. Under the new LDF arrangements this dissatisfaction may grow as detailed control policies cease, major applications increase and if development management is seen to exclude members. The existing statutory training for members is insufficient and our earlier recommendations are intended to address this (Recommendations 5.2 and 8.2 refer) but may add to pressures on the member training & development budget.

10.6. Some members, particularly those who had attended Planning Summer School events, felt that this training opportunity should continue. If this form of training were re-instated then it is essential that attendees pass on what they have learned to other members.

Customer and user focus

10.7. The Review Group notes that there is apparently no capacity within the service currently to answer general points contained in letters of objection, or enquiries, or acknowledge their receipt. Acknowledgements and substantive responses should be provided in future in a timely fashion, in line with the Council's existing customer care standards. Our impression is that response rates for calls and letters need to improve and an annual service report could prove to be a useful publicity tool.

10.8. Notwithstanding the introduction of better ICT to the service in the near future, responses should be given in the form preferred by the public rather than that which is most convenient or cost effective for staff.

- 10.9. Our recommendation relating to the agents' forum should improve the current position, particularly if it is used, as we would advocate, to listen as well as to explain / educate. The Review Group notes that there is currently no process for collecting customer feedback from any section of the community. This is essential, particularly in light of the introduction of a Comprehensive Area Agreement (CAA). A systematic approach to collecting, analysing and using such information should be introduced as soon as possible.

Enforcement

- 10.10. There is a degree of dissatisfaction amongst members with the shortcomings of the enforcement function and this is reflected in the survey results. The Review Group considers that the enforcement function should be more pro-active and visible in future, but also be proportional. We need re-assurance that the soon-to-be introduced ICT system will make it easier to track outstanding conditions, but would remind all other members that conditions that cannot be enforced should be avoided. Officer advice can be given on this point.

Consultation results

- 10.11. The two surveys conducted for us by the Council's Research team give some further clues as to what needs to be done to establish even better communications and relations than currently exist.
- 10.12. These surveys – of county councillors and parish clerks – give a remarkably consistent view.
- 10.13. When asked 'do you feel adequately informed about planning applications' 74% of councillors and 79% of clerks to town and parish councils said 'yes'. Perhaps accounting for the 'no' responses, a number of specific improvements were suggested including:
- Providing more initial information on the application.
 - Clarity over the process by which Councillors get items onto Planning Committee agendas.
 - The need for progress reports to avoid members chasing officers.
 - More time be given to town and parish councils.
 - Increasing the amount of explanation given to town and parish councils, perhaps including the past planning history of the site.
 - Clarity about S106 arrangements for town and parish councils.
 - The need for up to date plans and maps.
 - More knowledge of parish boundaries so that the correct councils were consulted.
- 10.14. When asked 'have you been adequately trained?', 81% of councillors who responded said 'yes' compared with only 23% of clerks. A follow up question 'do you think that town and parish councils (your council / in your area) have been adequately trained?' resulted in only 23% of councillors saying 'yes' compared with 36% of clerks. Based on these results the Review Group concludes that, despite the Planning Services' successes in the past, there is still a significant training need amongst town and parish councils. Perhaps this should focus on those councils that have yet to participate. The changes to the planning system that we have described earlier mean that this local knowledge and expertise needs enhancing rapidly. The training programme should be developed by the Planning Service and promoted as a Herefordshire Council initiative. To encourage attendance by town and parish council members this could be organised on an area basis e.g. north, city and south.

- 10.15. For members the following issues were highlighted for training:
- S106 agreements.
 - Declarations of interest.
 - On the future / LDF / regional spatial strategy.
 - Planning considerations.
- 10.16. Town and Parish Councils highlighted a need to understand more about officer-delegated powers; planning considerations and discretion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

10.A	A guide should be prepared for members on what can be paid for by S106 agreements. Amongst other things the guide should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear responsibilities for chasing contributions when the trigger points are reached. • How liability to pay transfers if sites are sold on or subdivided. • The treatment of interest / inflation proofing.
10.B	Local members should have more say at an earlier stage in what happens to S106 funds derived from developments in their wards. Consideration should be given to 'top slicing' income to supplement, not substitute for, the financing of permissible local aspirations under the parish plan.
10.C	There should be transparency about what S106 funds are spent on, what remains to be spent and what it is earmarked for. National guidance on the use of such funds should be followed consistently.
10.D	A final statement should be prepared for the public, local member and agents identifying how S106 money derived from each development was spent.
10.E	That a dedicated S106 officer be appointed as soon as it is appropriate.
10.F	The size of the member training budget be increased in light of the potential, future training needs identified in this report.
10.G	Notice is taken of the survey results reported here to improve communications and relationships in the future including acknowledging letters, providing progress reports, up to date maps and identifying the correct parish council for each application.
10.H	A training programme be developed and offered to town and parish councils by the Council
10.I	Standards should be set for acknowledging letters and telephone calls. Members and the public value personal contact and replies.
10.J	A systematic approach to collecting, analysing and using customer feedback should be introduced as soon as possible.
10.K	In view of member dissatisfaction, the enforcement service needs to be more visible and pro-active. The new ICT system should be used to report regularly on its activities and members kept informed when visits and decisions have taken place.

11. What service delivery arrangements will assist in the ongoing modernisation of the service?

- 11.1. In addition to all the points made earlier in this report, the Review Group wishes to comment further, and finally, on three specific elements of service delivery:
- ICT.
 - Accommodation.
 - Committees.

ICT

- 11.2. The Review Group have received a demonstration of the new ICT system to support the Planning Service. The demonstration outlined the background to the project, the phases of its implementation and an indication of how the public and officers will interact with the system. The Review Group wish to thank the Council's Project Manager and representatives from APP, Civica and Deloitte for attending and informing the Group.
- 11.3. Based on the demonstration the Review Group feel the new system will be a vast improvement and has much to commend it and should lead to a much improved service. A suggestion the Review Group have registered with the Project Manager for consideration is to include a facility enabling the public and Councillors to see the status of enforcement action concerned with a particular application and report any outstanding issues to the relevant Officer.
- 11.4. The Review Group note that the new ICT system for the Planning Service is only part of what has been termed 'the single environment platform' which is, in fact, an application that covers parts of both the Environment & Culture and the Regeneration directorates. While we are assured that it supports service delivery, we need to be re-assured that it will also meet wider corporate requirements through the performance management and risk application being implemented to a similar timetable.
- 11.5. The Review Group is pleased that the new planning system is to be funded corporately (including ongoing licensing fees) but it is clearly sensible that the Planning Service itself supports its implementation and use. We expect the 'go live' date of June 2009 to be met and expect the Environment Scrutiny Committee to monitor achievement.
- 11.6. It is regrettable that the public / users were not involved in the procurement process. The Review Group believes that members should now be involved in its implementation and set up period, getting a feel for the new system, and expressing a view as to its look and usability in what we believe is known as a 'sand pit' or 'test bed' environment.
- 11.7. Future ICT strategies should not allow systems, like the current MVM one, to become unsupported ever again. Planning is a major frontline service; old systems pose unacceptable reputation risks and may adversely affect the service's efficiency and effectiveness.
- 11.8. We understand that the new planning system allows access to and submission of planning applications 'on line' and, bases on the demonstration, we understand that objections can also be submitted in a similar way. We note that it has been reported that Herefordshire currently has the lowest on line application rate of any authority excluding the Isles of Scilly. However, as our survey shows, while the majority of

councillors (96%) prefer to be notified about planning application by e-mail, the majority of parish clerks (88%) prefer letters. While ICT produces considerable cost benefits to the Council, and may become our preferred communications channel, the Review Group is clear that the public should be able to choose, and remain with, their preferred method of contact.

- 11.9. The Review Group strongly supports the introduction of a document management system under a separate Herefordshire Connects work stream and urges its speedy implementation and swift roll out to the Planning Service. Considerable time and cost is currently being incurred by scanning off site. We believe that such systems integration will bring benefits. We have not explored these but trust the officer judgement on this matter. The introduction of both systems should bring with it a fundamental review and revision of the administrative systems within the service (business process re-engineering) including, we believe, the introduction of a single support team. Such changes are necessary if the service is to remain cost-effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO ICT

11.A	The new 'single environment platform' should be configured to meet the wider corporate requirements through the performance management and risk system as well as service needs.
11.B	A report should be made to the Environment Scrutiny Committee on the implementation of the system no later than September 2009.
11.C	As a matter of urgency, interested members, should have access to the new system as it is being developed and have the opportunity to give their opinions on its look and feel.
11.D	A full explanation of the new system's functionality, in plain English, should be provided to members and courses run to encourage its use amongst them and parish councils.
11.E	Future ICT strategies should prevent a repetition of systems becoming unsupported by their suppliers unless there is an adequate replacement available.
11.F	The principle that the public are able to choose their preferred type of communication should be adhered to. This is basic good customer care.
11.G	A compatible document management system should be introduced as soon as possible.
11.H	The business processes within the planning service should be reviewed and restructured for maximum efficiency and effectiveness alongside the introduction of ICT. Serious consideration should be given to a single administrative /support team for the whole service.

Accommodation

- 11.10. The Review Group is not convinced that the separate Planning reception at Garrick House benefits the service, although there may be corporate advantages and it is in line with the Council's current customer services policy. In particular it has been put to us that there has been no significant reduction in telephone calls to Planning staff, as calls are not resolved by Info-by-Phone. We question the benefits of this additional layer between the public and planners.
- 11.11. The Review Group would like to see all the Planning Service in one location. We believe that this would provide far greater opportunities for greater involvement in LDF as well as efficiency gains. Herefordshire is fortunate in that it has retained an holistic Planning Service of all major disciplines. However, we restate our conviction

that what is needed for the future is to merge and mix the current good staff into project teams and change traditional structures.

- 11.12. The Review Group supports the service's new location within the Regeneration directorate.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO ACCOMMODATION

11.I	The benefits of the current Planning reception arrangement should be clearly demonstrated by the forthcoming, revised customer services strategy.
11.J	Without prejudice to the previous recommendation, the joint accommodation strategy should ensure that all other elements of the Planning Service are co-located.

The current Committee system

- 11.13. The Review Group recognised right from the start that this was a subject that could have dominated its examination of the service delivery arrangements. It did not. The views of both the chairman of the Planning Committee and the current Cabinet member (Environment and Strategic Housing) were sought and are understood. However, our survey of Council Members (of whom 50% responded) produced very few comments at all, either for or against, significant changes to our area-based system. From this we conclude that there is little appetite for change within the current Council, but that this should be kept under regular review.
- 11.14. The facts are as follows: appreciating that each authority varies in its geographical, population and number of planning application submissions, Herefordshire is in a small minority of planning authorities (14%) that have an area committee model. Only 7 of 46 unitary planning authorities have area committees. We understand that it is a relatively expensive system involving three separate officer teams and report writing, plus staff attendance for up to four committees each month. As resources are demonstrably limited, this may be financially unsustainable in the long run. Equally, the reduction in the number of planning applications on agendas currently could make the area committee process look inefficient. However, we have not seen any evidence that the current system slows down the application process or makes meeting the target turn-round times more difficult.
- 11.15. More significant in our view is that the three teams of Development Control officers could have different cultures. That is unacceptable. We have already recommended that their administrative support should be merged. Resources should be reviewed to support strategic areas and reflect the volume and complexity of applications in each area.
- 11.16. We are not going to consider the merits of the current system as opposed to a variety of alternative models. However, we consider that supporters of the current system may overstate the opportunities it provides for active member involvement in local issues (limited by law). Arguably a single committee would allow more active member engagement locally, but potentially, a loss of local knowledge on the committee itself.
- 11.17. Public engagement, if measured by attendance, is generally varied depending upon the type/size of application being considered. It is hard to see how a single committee could improve this and advocates for this model may underestimate the

need for more frequent meetings and / or more delegation if it were to be adopted. We note that the new Planning Act 2008 may require more delegation to officers anyway and consider that its implications should be explained to members before its various stages are implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM

11.K	The relative costs of the area based committee system and a single committee should be established and benchmarked against other authorities. The Executive should review the results on a regular basis.
11.L	The implications of the Planning Act 2008 need to be explained to all members as part of the proposed training programme, particularly in advance of the enactment of its various elements.

List of Interviewees

Councillors

Councillor TW Hunt	Chairman of Planning Committee
Councillor JG Jarvis	Cabinet Member – Environment and Strategic Housing

Officers

Mr Andrew Ashcroft	Head of Planning and Transportation
Mr Greg Evans	Management Accounts Manager
Mr Akif Kazi	Programme Manager – Herefordshire Connects.
Mr Mark Tansley	Planning Area Officer -Northern Team Leader
Mr Mike Willmont	Planning Area Officer – Central Team Leader
Mr Simon Withers	Planning Area Officer – Southern Team Leader
Mr Peter Yates	Planning Policy Manager

Users of the Service

Mr G Burton	Burton & Co Brimfield, Ludlow
Mr T Ford	Axys Design, Hereford
Mr C Goldsworthy	St Owen Street, Hereford
Mr A Jamieson	Jamieson Associates, Hereford

Herefordshire Council

Planning and Transportation

Development Management Team

May 2008

Development Control (what we used to do)

- Purpose: to minimise harm, enhance environment, process applications
- Restricted to land use matters
- Restricted to considering specific application types
- Consults others
- Asks, "What does the policy say?"
- Primacy of Development Plan
- Requires interpretation of national, regional and local policies
- Focussed on separate environmental, economic, social and resource issues raised by proposal
- Asks: "Is this good enough to approve - or bad enough to refuse?"

Development Management (what we do now)

- Purpose: to manage development to maximise planning objectives: "Place shaping"
- Includes all spatial issues in RSS, LAA and SCS
- Includes working with partner agencies to deliver development including key infrastructure
- Consultees become partners
- Asks: "What are we trying to achieve?"
- Looks beyond the DP to the LAA and SCS
- Calls for the same interpretation, *plus evaluation of the proposal against spatial vision, objectives and policies*
- Focus on sustainability and the likely outcomes of proposals
- Asks: "Can this proposal help to achieve our spatial vision and objectives?"

P.J.Yates
Development Manager
May 2008

Appendix 3

Report of Planning Services Review for Members survey

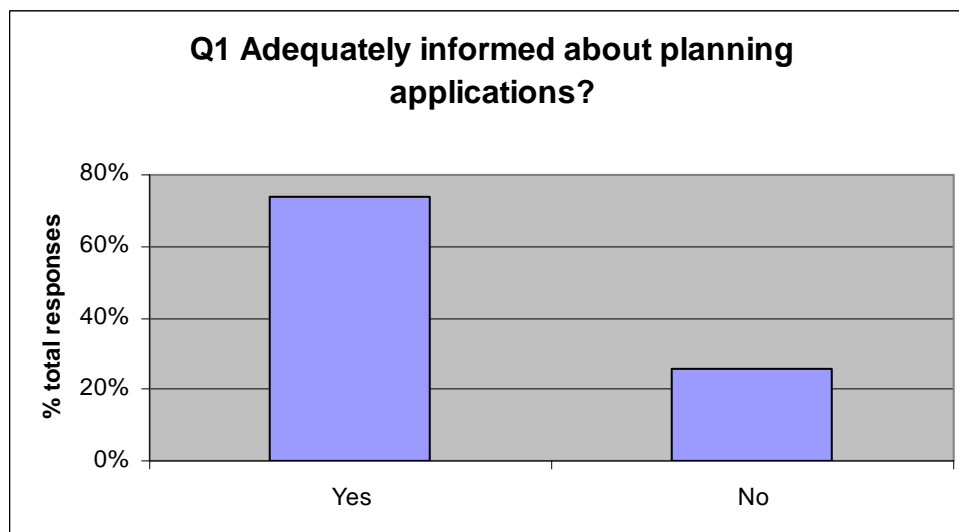
The environment scrutiny committee is reviewing the planning service and wish to establish the views of all the members of the council. For this reason, Planning Services Review for Members survey was launched on 23rd of July 2008. A questionnaire was sent to all council members and the survey was live till 16th of September 2008. The responses received by 22nd of September 2008 were included in this analysis and the responses received after this date were not included in this report.

This full report summarises the findings of the Planning Services Review survey for the members and also includes lists of free text comments in the appendices.

Total number of respondents to this survey was 29. Unless otherwise stated, all the proportions in this report are given as a percentage of the number of respondents to each question.

Q1 Do you feel adequately informed about planning applications in your ward? If no, what specific improvement(s) would you like to see?

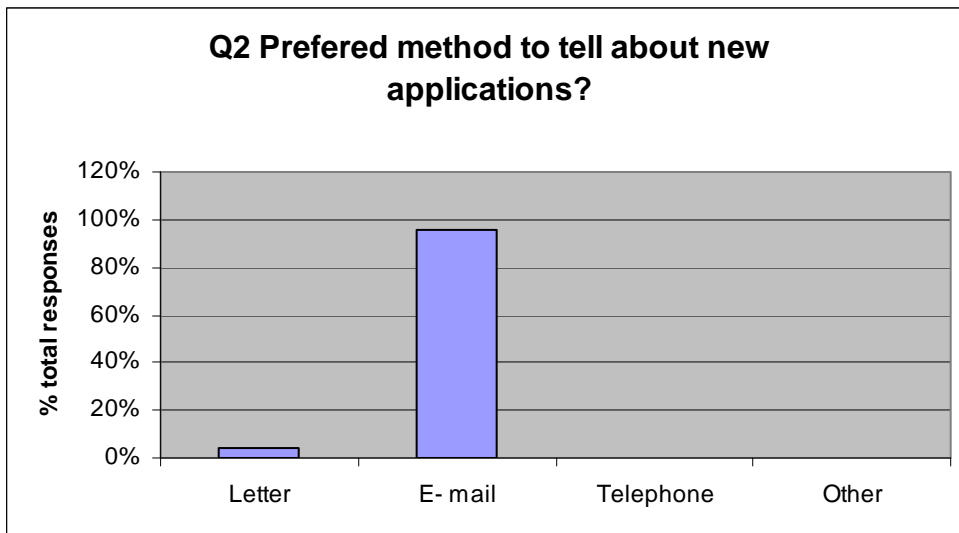
	Number	%
Yes	20	74%
No	7	26%
Not answered	2	
Total responses	27	



There are 15 comments listed in the appendix 1.

**Q2 How do you prefer planning officers to tell you about new applications?
(Tick one box only)**

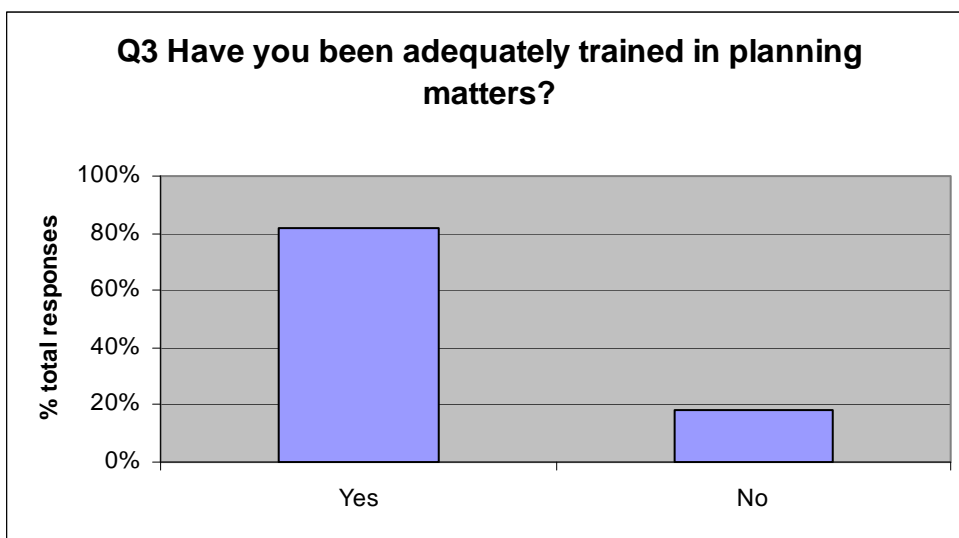
	Number	%
Letter	1	4%
E- mail	24	96%
Telephone	0	0%
Other	0	0%
Not answered	4	
Total responses	25	



There are 5 comments listed in the appendix 2

**Q3 Have you been adequately trained in planning matters?
If no, what subjects would you like any future training events to cover?**

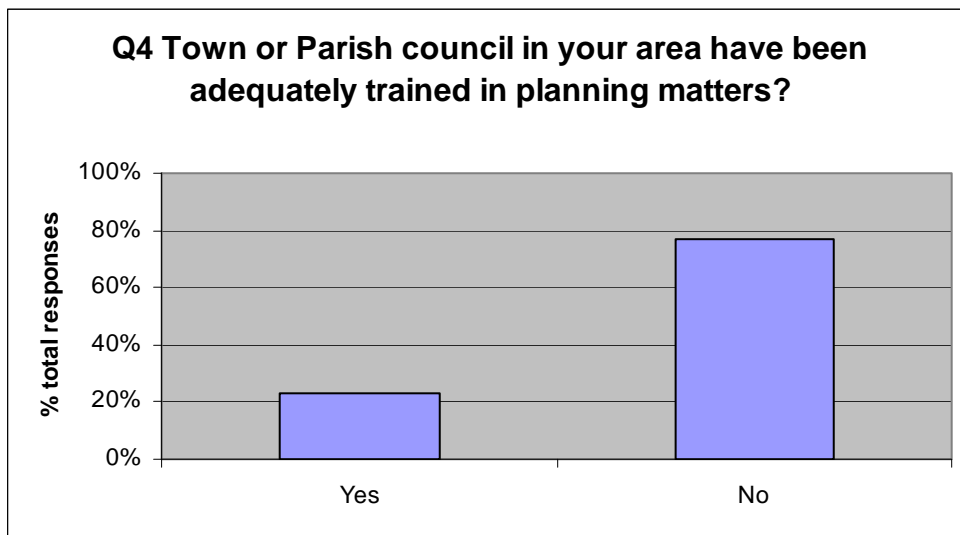
	Number	%
Yes	22	81%
No	5	19%
Not answered	2	
Total responses	27	



There are 15 comments listed in the appendix 3.

**Q4 Do you think that town and parish councils in your area have been adequately trained in planning matters?
If no, what subjects do you think would be of most use to them?**

	Number	%
Yes	6	23%
No	20	77%
Not answered	3	
Total responses	26	



There are 24 comments listed in appendix 4.

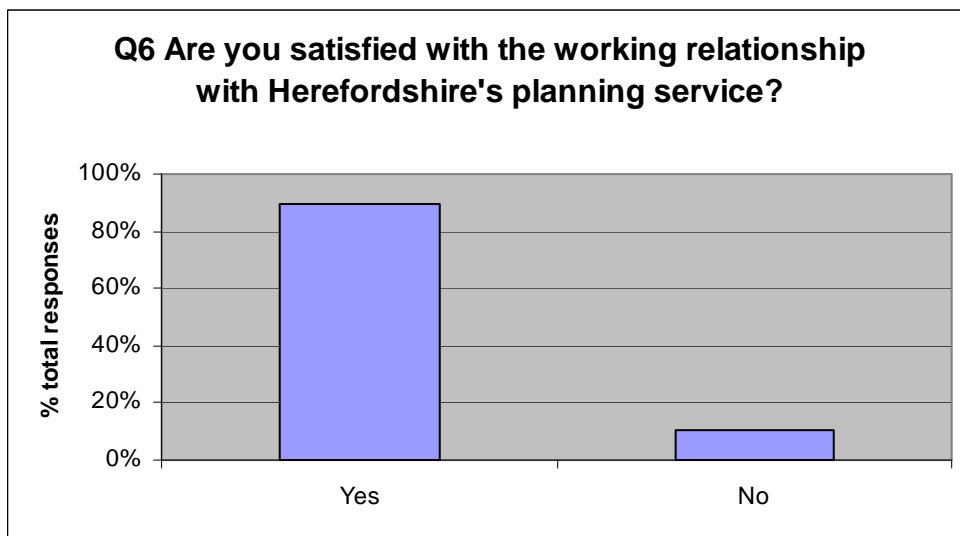
Q5 what improvements, if any, would you like to make to the way in which Herefordshire Council's Planning Committees are run?

There are 23 comments listed in appendix 5.

Q6 Are you satisfied with the working relationship you have with Herefordshire’s planning service?

If no, what would improve the working relationship?

	Number	%
Yes	26	90%
No	3	10%
Not answered	0	
Total responses	29	



There are 11 comments listed in the appendix 6.

Q7 Are there any other comments you would like to make which are relevant to this review of planning services?

There are 19 comments listed in the appendix 7.

Appendix 1 – Comments for Q1

1. initial notification of applications is adequate

2. **Information on progress of applications is never forthcoming voluntarily-** it is necessary for me to contact the planning officer for progress report. I believe the oms should be on the planning officer.

All previous applications on site should be noted down then we would be able to look at application in its complete state. ie. A planning application for a parish doesn't seem important but if site has been previously extended it would be helpful to know. (within 21 days period)

Find it strange that each application is accompanied by a form (when e-mailed to ward member) requiring its completion and agreement by sub-committee chairman for a report to committee. **Any member should have the right to ask for it to go to committee** if in their ward and if based on proper planning grounds. (A member of the public receives this consideration)

Generally speaking Yes.

I am only emailed the very broadest terms of an application. I would wish to receive or have the link to the full application to research online. Also not all the info is in one location and I end up going between Blueschool Street and Garrick House.

In general the day to day applications are sent through when appropriate. It is the long term and for reaching decisions made by senior officers/cabinet members that are not discussed at the initial stages. ie. Communication with large companies/housing.

Individual notifications should include some indication of what is proposed.

More information needed on the initial planning application notification (via email) i.e more details reference the description and location.

On line pictures would be helpful.

Only adequate not fully informed.

See comments no. 6

There needs to be a change in to format of informing chairman for an agenda new to committee.

Usually but there have been exceptions.

We are governed by the office of the dept of PM. we are not free to change or need to now. However, when the UDP march 2007 expires in about 2-3 years time, government may have changed the system again.

Would like to be informed after the consultation period the recommendation instead of having to chase this up.

Appendix 2 – Comments for Q2

By weekly plans list as now, members can then follow up if necessary.

I prefer letters but can cope with emails, just!

Individual letter/emails for each area.

No preference- however to avoid being prejudicial and any changes now

Please put address of subject premises/location in email heading for application

Appendix 3 – Comments for Q3

All aspects of planning

But that is my opinion. Use UDP (???) common sense. Have not impressed with training sessions to date.

But Those info new systems of planningwould be welcome.

But, There is always scope for further training for example on **106 agreements** and how they work. Parish councils also need help and information on these.

Changes in **section 106** procedures particularly where the members fits into the process

I consider that it would be beneficial for further training in planning matters- including changes in planning issues **like 106 agreements** and a thorough 'back to basics' on material planning considerations.

It would be beneficial for new members to receive more than a brief overview of planning which should include its relationship to the UDP (or RSS when in place)

New SPD

pps 8- rollout programme of the mobile phone operations. They do send on plans that the average councillor never see.

Section 106 agreements. Suddenly the committee officers very concerned about these. More information - such as a seminar might provide would be useful.

The initial hardship is when a newly elected member has to make decisions on behalf of the ward when they really have not had enough in site into the planning process.

Too many seminars already.

Training has been repetitive with much used 'case studies' . I would refer to look at Incoming legislation RSS. & realistic plans for the shire county.

we keep training within the capacity of own time. Planning officers are there to help us 'how???' to know their business and we can help them too.

Yes, although improvements always possible.

Appendix 4 – Comments for Q4

1. Case studies of applications relevant to their situation. 2. detailed examination of relevant parts of the UDP.

106 issues & affordable housing. I get asked often by parishes on how they can use **106 to help** implement parish plans.

106 monies and how delegated decisions are reached. The perception that all planning come to sub committees or main planning. The ways government influence local decisions regarding planning.

All aspects of planning

All subjects

Basic training in the rules

City council most members are Twin halted (???), but training would be useful for new members, & refresher for old hands!

Differences **between prejudicial and personal interests. What are planning reasons?** All planning training should be compulsory.

Don't know.

However, while it would be useful for them to understand the process. Sometimes the PC common sense approach can be useful and reflects peoples view in an application as applied to how well it reflects our policies.

It is not their job to be trained in planning matters. Consultation with the Parish council is about awareness that Planning officers would now be aware that is the required limit of this purpose.

New SPD

Notes to each councillor + talk to each council.

Only town clerks and their assistants have had adequate training

Parish councillors should receive training similar to Q3 above. In particular what planning officers would like to see by way of appropriate and relevant comments and how to reference the appropriate area of the planning documents i.e.UDP etc.

Parish councillors would feel more secure in their role if more training would be given.

Process including **declaration of interest**. Need to make representations based on council's resolution, not individuals' views and /or informal sub-committee. Need to understand main principles of policy, and all presentations must be based on these.

Need to be persuaded that their views count & will be heard. Need to know they can come & speak at sub-committee. Provided council has so resolved.

Reasons to refuse an application that are **valid 106 agreements**

some basic planning training for parish councillors should be mandatory

Specific training on how Parish Councils can be heard ie. how to influence decisions when they matter to the parish

Structured approach/planning consideration/UDP/sec **106 SPD**

The situation has improved but **declarations of interest** still need to be taken more seriously and should be more strongly emphasised. At the beginning of meetings.

However, the majority of parish councillors are far better informed on planning matters and the local plan than when I was first elected. More training about the local frame work would also be useful.

Think PCs are UDP + Common sense

Training in: Planning protocol in relation to committee meetings. (When the PC makes a representation -speakers). Planning issues in general - **material planning considerations**.

Appendix 5 – Comments for Q5

1. **Visuals are very poor**; other councils have proper screens etc with sound system.

2. We do not get the full text of letters etc. not full info.

Agenda can sometimes be too long.

Allow flexibility on 3 mins, Allow objections and support use of projector/slides etc rather than the just verbal, Allow planning committee to make recommendations to Environment committee scrutiny & also to link better into licensing ie. caravans req 2 committee approvals.

Area sub committees are vital proposals for their abolition and all going to main planning are ludicrous!

By restructuring the area system, **one committee** is a formula adopted and in practice by a greater number of LPAs. It saves money; officer time gives greater influence to local members and other benefits.

Chaired in a more timely manner, in particular central sub committee

Happy with current area/main planning committee systems

I think the present system is satisfactory.

I would **separate political groups** to encourage more robust examination of applications at meetings.

In general, Central sub planning committee is run excellently.

It has been brought to my attention that speakers feel disadvantaged when a site visit has been asked for and they have already spoken. They feel members are likely not to

remember what has been said because the next meeting is not until the next month.
Members to consult normally with officers before meetings.

More balanced and more professional. Less growling. **Presentations of photos and drawings needs to be much better-frequently barely distinguishable.**

Mostly I find the committee satisfactory, however 1. Presentations tend to be a run through out proposal-highlighting the key policies and the issue against there could be useful. 2. **Quality of maps, photo + plans often not good** when put on to an overhead projector.

None.

Only one comment- that members should be encouraged (in debates) to stick to the key issues- otherwise very lengthily meetings result and items at the end of the Agenda then have to be debated early evening (with members of the public still waiting).

Sometimes the agendas are too heavy. Less items going more time for debate.

Suggest that, for electoral purposes, some councillors may not be correctly focussed on applications in their own wards and may focus on issues which are from a majority of residents rather than acceptable from a planning viewpoint? One committee only with greater delegated powers in view of latest changes in planning law.

That planning officers be taught how to address a meeting. How to talk into a microphone. The sequence of a hearing in excellent. Debate is good. Regretfully, members often to now know they are not representing their electorates-their job is semi judicial of an '?????'

The area sub committees are essential to keep local members involved on the planning process

The committees should be run in **non political themes.** The most experienced members should lead.

They seem to be run very well and the public speaking element is both effective and well managed. The often robust debate in northern area is good for democracy and accountability.

Train planning officers in presentation and how to deal with debate without appearing

Appendix 6 – Comments for Q6

But think we all need to remember we are servants of the public and sometimes this is ignored.

Earlier notification of problems or contentious decisions. Perhaps a dialogue on identification of contentious elements would help.

However, improvements always possible. I feel this is an area were an excellent working relationship could give huge benefits to the service provided by councillors+ planning officers to our community. In an ideal world planning officers + members would never disagree!

I feel the officers do not fully understand our role and look upon us as an irritation.

I find the planning service very helpful and the officers always friendly and courteous. I support their recommendation in my ward 95% of the time.

I think we are well served by our planning officers, but moving staff around is not helpful!

It individually takes time to establish mutual trust.

Role of enforcement. We only have 1 officer & he is spread for this.

The ability to get all relevant details of an application on screen

There isn't a working relationship.

Would prefer planning application files to be made available on request at Brockington for a couple of days which are mutually convenient.

Appendix 7 – Comments for Q7

1. Previously the notification of planning application to ward councillors had tick boxes. * Bring to committee ** Keep me advised on progress. In "keeping ward councillors advised", the review group might establish what is Good Practice, Normal Practice, Accepted Practice, Best Practice in other authorities. In this authority, normal practice is that planning officers keep councillors advised very reluctantly.

1. The elected members must decide what comes to committee -not the officers. 2. **Planning sub committees' must be retained.** 3. There is an obvious move to reduce applications coming to committee in an attempt to close them down.

As a member of Hereford city council planning committee I feel that I am adequately informed only because I am a member of the unitary. But I know that those who are solely parish councillors feel 'left out of the loop'.

Do not move to one planning committee .the decision is as good as the report and the standard varies. I have a perception that no one ensures standard, consistency. see last Northern area planning re s106 agreements for how applicants were treated. the new tariff system should improve s106 aspects. The update sheet sent round at the committee should be emailed late afternoon the day before as often on a complex case you need time to think some of the late information. More attention needs to be paid to stimulating good architecture. I dread to think what residents of the future will think about our contribution to social architecture- estates of red brick boxes. Every applicant should be treated with respect. Local members work closely with officers. Every application on to 'own merit' should be carefully considered ' "material consideration" sometimes ignored.

Having acquired the Taylor review of rural economy and affordable housing that spells at a vision of a living, working, sustainable countryside. I would like other members to have the chance of reading this because it advocates for change in the way Authorities view planning for the future.

Hope that comments raised will be taken into consideration and this is not just a paper exercise.

I think the system works very well.

I think there is a conflict of interest when councillors want to support their local communities and planning policies made this difficult. When going against officers recommendations clear reasons should be given ie. An exception to policing doesn't like the policy.

Local members could sometimes benefit from more information about enforcement matters. Members of the public often phone their local members and expect him or her to know. We realise that the enforcement officers have a huge workload. A brief update about a contentious issue would sometimes be very helpful either by phone or email. Not always possible, I know.

No

Some members do not show proper courtesy or regard to planning officers. Some members do not have proper regard to planning policies etc. Some members do not appear to benefit from training. In short one of the weakest links in the system of planning is the members.

Speaking at sub-committees by applicants/objectors needs to be changed. The present system may lead to unfairness in that the speakers may put forward their views and the application subsequently deferred with the decision subsequently taken at a meeting with different attendees. (eg. The Holmer Industrial Estate application was determined 3 months after the speakers gave their views, but helping 2 local members (+others) not hearing their views, but helping to determine the application some 3 months later!)

The diagrams/plans that appear in agenda are of little or no help. Can there be improved please?

The maps included with the individual application notes are not informative enough.

The use of up to date maps. ie some maps are as much as 15 years out of date and do not have previous planning permissiaries included in them.

What is the "Growth points agenda"? Imperative that the LDF improves the balance presentation of the countryside and allowance for new homes when/where this community as a whole wants them.

With so many changes, I think a DVD would be useful, rather than rounds of reports & paper work.

Yes, the new planning proposals for 2/3 years time needs to provide for achieving at least a 10 year development planning policy. That accounts with the council. I don't think the march 2007 UDP was sufficiently understood by the members who voted for it, and now ruled by it. The objectives of HFD council are not profited in the UDP
eg 1. Attracting new businesses into county.

2. Not providing for exec housing to match new business.
3. Not providing enough business dev parks/estates.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

	Councillors	Clerks
Overall response	29/58 – 50%	64/134 – 48%
Q1 do you feel adequately informed about planning applications?.....	Yes 74% No 26%	Yes 79% No 21%
Suggestions for specific improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ More initial information ❖ The process by which councillors get items onto committee agendas ❖ Progress / recommendations are not volunteered but have to be chased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Lack of time ❖ Lack of explanation ❖ Section 106 agreements ❖ Maps & plans being out of date ❖ Lack of knowledge of parish boundaries. Wrong things sent ❖ Historical information needed
Q2 How do you prefer to be informed about planning applications?	Letter 4% E-mail 96%	Letter 88% E-mail 11%
Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Repeat of initial information point 	
Q3 Have you been adequately trained?	Yes 81% No 19%	Yes 32% No 68% Q4
If no, what subjects would you like training in?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Section 106 agreements ❖ RSS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Delegation, planning considerations, discretion
Q4 Do you think that town & parish councils (your council) have been adequately trained?	Yes 23% No 77%	Yes 36% No 64% Q5
If no, what should training cover?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Section 106 agreements ❖ Declaration of interests ❖ The future, LDF ❖ Planning reasons 	
Q5 What improvements would you like to make to the way that HC planning committees are run	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Visual aids / plans / maps ❖ Agendas ❖ Presentations by officers ❖ Politics ❖ Four mentions of single v area committees – balanced 	Q6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ More notice / time to be given ❖ Less delegation to officers ❖ Taking notice of PC views ❖ Location of committee meetings

		❖ 3 minute limit on speaking
Q6 Are you satisfied with the working relationship with HC planning service?	Yes 90% No 10%	Yes 81% No 19% Q7
Comments		❖ Communications ❖ Ignoring PC views ❖ Providing explanations ❖ Enforcement
Q7 Are there are any other comments you would like to make?	❖ Repeats visual aids / plans / maps point. ❖ Support for area committees	Q8 ❖ Enforcement ❖ Ignoring PC views ❖ Early input to large developments / proposals
Q3 (Clerks only) If a planning officer were available how would you like them to attend meetings		On request = 47 Complex issues = 34

Note:-

Similar overall response rates between Councillors and Parish clerks.

Q1 Similar proportion of councillors and clerks feel adequately informed about planning applications.

Q2 A major difference in how Councillors (e-mail) and Clerks (letter) prefer to be informed about planning applications.

Q3 A difference in perceived training needs; the majority of councillors feel they have been adequately trained, a majority of clerks do not feel adequately trained.

Q4 Councillors do not feel that parish councils have been adequately trained, parish clerks agree with them.

Q6 Similar proportions of councillors and clerks are satisfied with their working relationship with the planning service.

Appendix 4

Report of Planning Services Review survey

Herefordshire Council is reviewing the planning service. Town and Parish Councils have important roles to play in the planning process where Parish clerks play major role. To find out the views of parish clerks, Planning Services Review survey has carried out from 16th July to 16th September 2008. A questionnaire was posted to all Parish clerks on 16th of July 2008 and the responses received by 22nd of September 2008 were included in data analysis. The responses received after this date were not included.

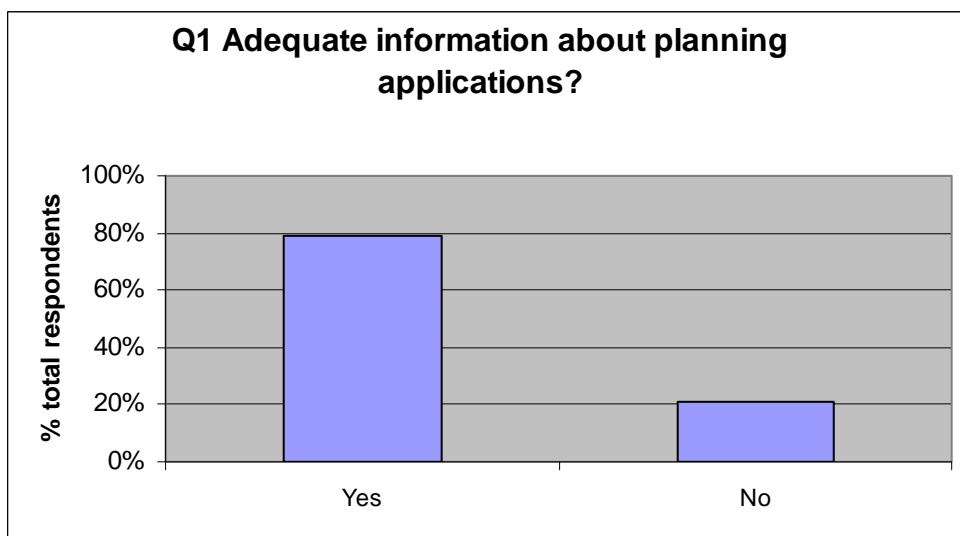
This full report summarises the findings of the Planning Services Review survey for the parish clerks and also includes lists of free text comments in the appendices.

Total number of respondents to this survey was 64. Unless otherwise stated, all the proportions in this report are given as a percentage of the number of respondents to each question.

Q1 Do you feel adequately informed about planning applications in your Council's area?

If no, what specific improvement(s) would you like to see?

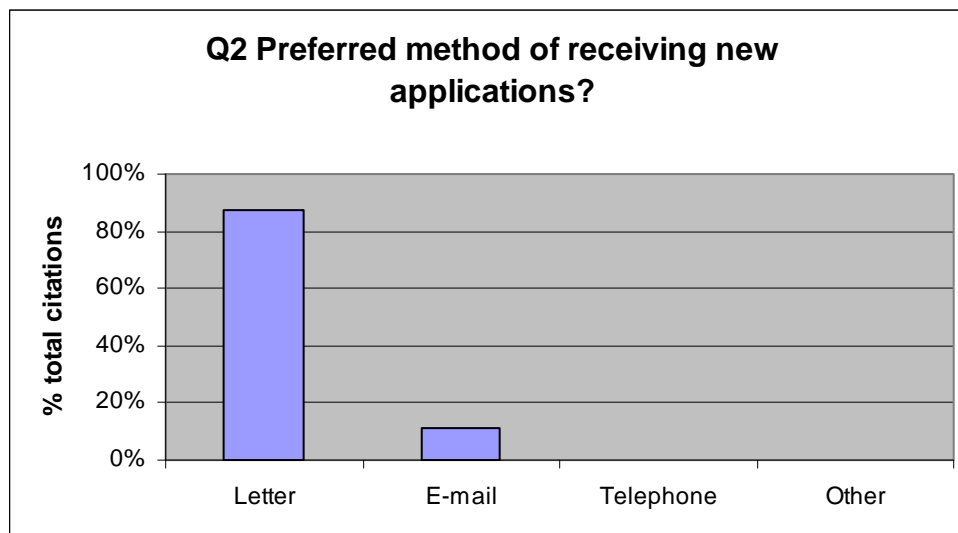
	Number	%
Yes	49	79%
No	13	21%
Not answered	2	
Total responses	62	



There were 18 other comments made.

**Q2 How do you prefer Herefordshire Council to tell you about new applications?
(Tick one box apply)**

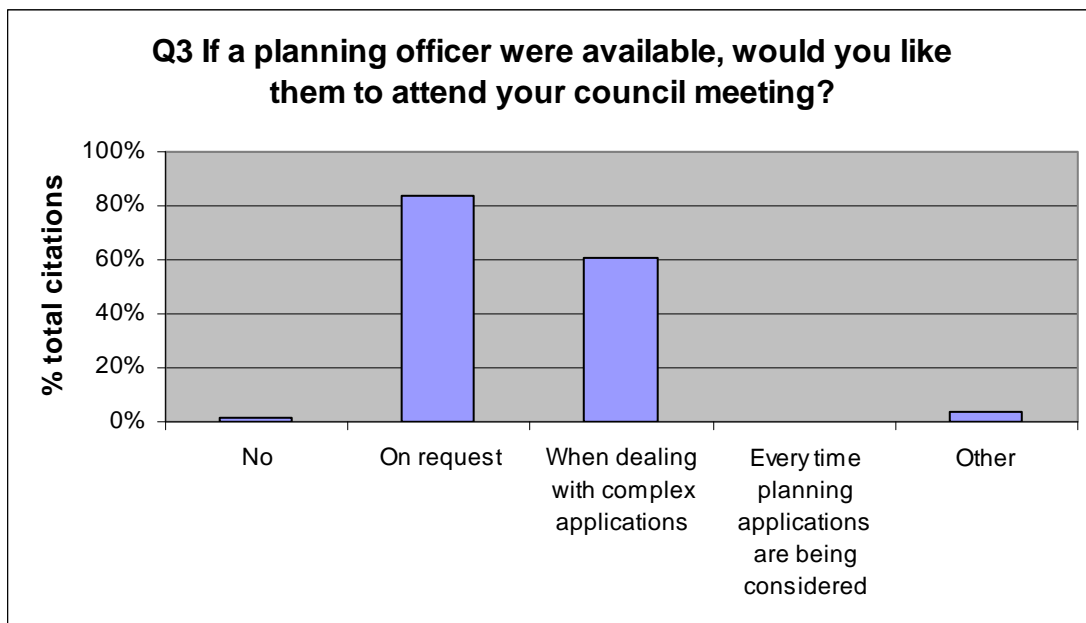
	Number	%
Letter	56	88%
E-mail	7	11%
Telephone	0	0%
Other	0	0%
Not answered	1	
Total responses	64	



4 comments were made explaining their answers.

Q3 If a planning officer were available, would you like them to attend your Council meeting? (Tick all that apply)

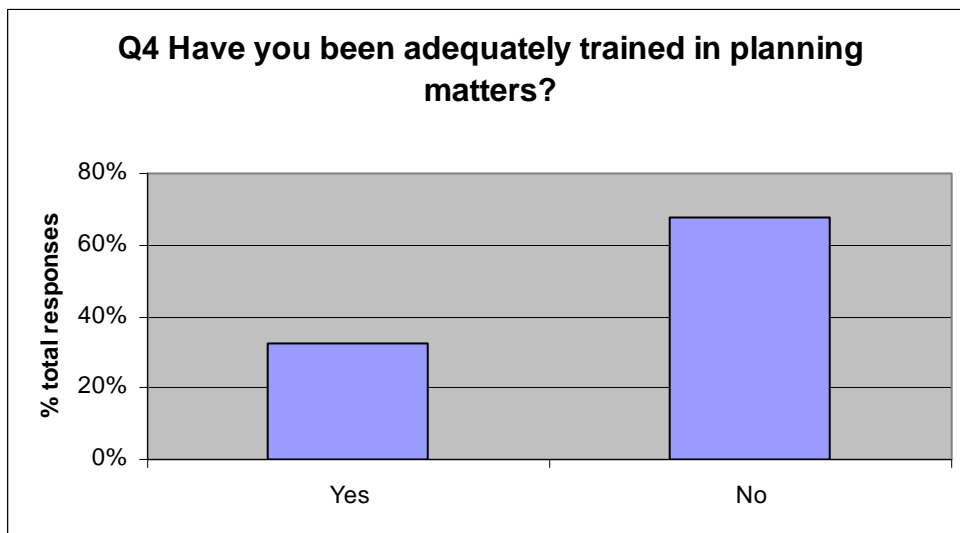
	Number	%
No	1	2%
On request	47	84%
When dealing with complex applications	34	61%
Every time planning applications are being considered	0	0%
Other	2	4%
Not answered	8	
Total responses	56	



There were 8 other comments made.

**Q4 Have you been adequately trained in planning matters?
If no, what future training would you like?**

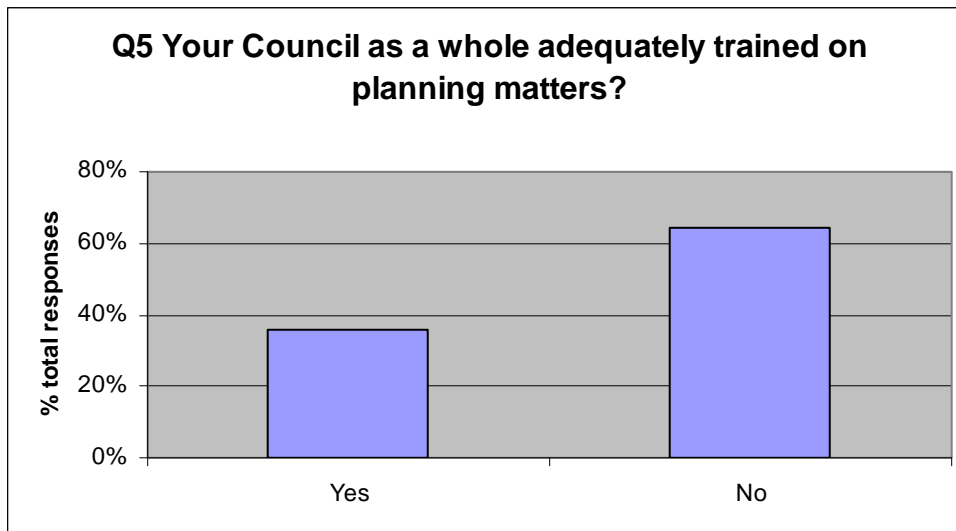
	Number	%
Yes	19	32%
No	40	68%
Not answered	5	
Total responses	59	



43 comments were made.

**Q5 In your opinion, do you think your Council as a whole has been adequately trained in planning matters?
If no, what subjects would be of most use to them?**

	Number	%
Yes	20	36%
No	36	64%
Not answered	8	
Total responses	56	



There were 39 comments made.

Q6 What improvements, if any, would you like to make to the way in which Herefordshire Council's Planning Committees are run?

There were 45 comments made.

Q7 Are you satisfied with the working relationship you have with Herefordshire's planning service?

	Number	%
Yes	48	81%
No	11	19%
Not answered	5	
Total responses	59	



21 comments were made.

Q8 Are there any other comments you would like to make which are relevant to this review of planning services?

There were 34 comments made.

Appendix 1 – Comments for Q1

Although sometimes it is a **bit short notice**

If an application is approved when we have recommended rejection, or rejected when we have recommended approval, **we should be informed** of the precise reasons for the difference, including references (i.e paragraph number of local plan etc)

More interaction first level of planning application-106- we would like to have involvement in this as the community of (XXXXX) have large housing developments 7 we have no say in any of this.

N.B There are normal passes in case of certification of development and notification of decisions but there I am sure, we no minor omissions which happen in the best run system.

Need more time to comment for major ones

Note: **But only within our boundaries, would appreciate knowledge of contentious applications in adjoining parishes.**

On the whole, the system works, but there have **been occasions when applications have not been received. (XXX and XXX)**. Parish councils would like **more time** to consider applications, so extend notification would be appreciated.

see answers to Q8

Some times 'HIT' or @MISS@ being sent to **appropriate parish council.**

Speedier return of decisions/more time and **clearer indications of how decisions are arrived at and who by (planners or committee)** plus better co-ordination with Parish Councils who should be able to help Planners and take some of the burden, especially with their localised knowledge.

The XXX council is adequately informed about planning applications. However, specific improvements could include becoming involved in pre application discussions relating to larger developments well in advance of the application being submitted. In addition the XXX council would like further influence in decisions relating to the use of S106 monies raised from developers and suggests that participative community involvement in the decision making relating to S106 funding should be actively explored.

The website needs to be updated faster. **Update your maps of local areas as many are years out of date.**

XXX council would like copies of section 106 Agreement on various applications and would like to be involved in the s 106 process at an early stage so that local input could be considered.

We are kept reasonably well informed and are given adequate time for consultation, but often **HDC planners is not adequately informed about parish boundaries.**

Some applications have been sent to neighbouring p.c's

We encounter two problems. Sometimes we are asked to comment on applications **outside but close to our boundary.** Some cases we are not. If an application is modified or re-submitted in a different way the consultation rounds often fails.

We generally are adequately notified about applications but **sometimes key information has been missing.** For example when a new house was requested for an agricultural worker we did not receive supporting reports which we would have disputed as incorrect. We were not informed of the significance of outline permission and consequently a house was built that should never have been approved. The house is now a white elephant and will continue to be an issue since we are sure the owner will seek.

We need to have the plans etc for each application on-line from Hereford council as soon as the application is received by the Parish. Either change on line system or delay sending application.

would like any relevant historical information regarding the application (ie previous applications)

Appendix 2 – Comments for Q2

But only if plans are available on line at the same venue
Have already requested council notice as soon as applications are received
It is useful for councillors to view all plans
With an email if there is anything urgent or out of the ordinary]

Appendix 3 – Comments for Q3

Also if there are contentious issues
Annually
Attendance as required and requested for controversial or unusual applications.
Can only be achieved if adequate staff are available, (at no cost to Parish council)
Clearly not practical for all applications but desirable for lodge/controversial cases.
This point has already been thoroughly covered in your consultation on involvement of local committee and I hope previous is now in train for this.
This would be very rare in this parish.
To update on changes in planning guidance and to discuss area of concern.

Appendix 4 – Comments for Q4

1. It would help to have similar training sessions to those availability to county councillors
2. To **explain the delegation system**.
A reasonably detailed resume of planning law, in particular the constraints under which officers work, and the guidelines etc. **Which lead them to make the decisions they make** (in printed form, for reference- a training course is not necessary)
PLEASE NOTE: This has been filled in by the clerk and I believe it to express views which reflect the views of the council.
A trainings session for all parish councillors would be useful.
All councillors are 'volunteers'
An insight into **planning considerations/processes** would be useful.
Annual updates on the planning process and how the XXX council can make informed comments.
Any training valuable to Parish clerks training is provided by HALC but anything by HPDC would be welcomed.
Any which would be relevant to clerks and Parish Councillors
As to what is/what is not permissible. The amount of discretion and flexibility that is allowed.
Becoming clerk from new is daunting- planning matters were non existent within the Parish Council and one learns from experience. There is no guide available and questions are answered but not the consequences or alternatives given. A booklet/guide/ or contact point made known. A short training session for a Parish Council could be effective.
Been a clerk 10 years and except for some HALC training have never had any training on planning matters. So any would be welcome.
Brief training in corporation with other local councils.
But I shall continue to encourage Parish Councillors to attend HALC training on

planning.

But the core strategy changes everything and new training will be required

Compulsory training for all councillors.

don't know

general planning issues

Guidance, information, legal requirements

How to assess which relevant policy to the application.

I have good working knowledge of planning matters but additional training would be useful, particularly if it could be accredited.

Need to know which planning officers are in each area need to be kept up to date with changes in policies eg when UDP policies are being superseded by LDF policies.

None- Not my job. knowledge gained through experience and asking questions is adequate to do job of Parish clerk.

ongoing training - locally based with other clerks in the area/ have involvement

ongoing training on subject matter

Only through HALC. Any other training are offered? What about new regulations?

Parish councillors learn by experience. They are more able to take a view similar to a planning committee as opposed to planners; ie. They think more globally. Sometimes, they do attend planning training seminars but they are not, and never will be planners.

Perhaps a seminar could be arranged for all councillors to attend to be briefed in what is currently the objectives 7 accepted planning of Herefordshire council.

Perhaps an annual seminar for clerks and parish councillors where training and consideration of shared experiences can occur, plus ad hoc meetings where necessary with planning personnel (eg in the case of complex or controversial planning applications.)

Some, we are attending various training courses run by HALC

Suitable training to fulfil the planning committee roles.

The chairman of our Parish Council has a good knowledge of planning matters and as Parish Clerk I rely on his input & experience, further training for the parish clerk may be relevant in the future.

The role of the Parish Council in planning matters

The training is in position. Councillors just need to attend.

There are adequately trained parish councillors available.

There are certain assets of the current UDP that are not easily understood or "Layman"-prior to the acceptance of the forthcoming LDF it would be helpful to have a presentation(s)/briefing on its content and application. It would be helpful to have a planning 'aide memoire' to assist in decision making/inclusion of helpful comments etc when responding to planning applications.

Training course (short) for councillors would be useful. E.g. a HALC evening services.

Training on site for planning related matters

Training on what powers planning /council's may have on obtaining beautiful community improvement as part of conditions approving planning developments eg developers pay for play equipment/adventure park/part fund village hall etc

Updates of changes of policies and procedures

We ask advise as necessary.

We think that there could be a case for regular (6 monthly) briefings on any new issues and a reminder about basic principles. We have learned through experience and my Councillors are happy about that route. However, we have failed to understand and grasp the relevance of the situation on a few occasions (refer to Q1).

What training is available?

When planning refers to obscure reference numbers, only known to them. A brief explanation or 'Planning Info Sheet' would be very useful

Appendix 5 – Comments for Q5

As answer to Q4 (6)

Basics: ie. how close to a property can you build can you complaint if your view is spoiled etc

Broader spectrum

But request further visit to council meeting in future

Can't judge but understand from the press that the nation is short of trained planners.

As for parish councillors/clerks, no doubt they could use more knowledge.

Committee should take the professional advice of there officers.

Compulsory 1 day training on dealing with planning issues & their relationship with the UDP. Should be part & parcel of being A P Councillor.

Don't know wherever training courses are suggested there are never any show of hands.

General training would be helpful. see Q4

HALC/planning services to arrange more frequent training sessions on all aspects of planning.

I'm sure the pc would benefit from understanding what policies apply to which area:
UDP

in house training by planning officers on general planning issues

localised training - possible grouped with other parish councils

Many members of the XXX council are dual hatted and have training from

Herefordshire council. Additional training for other members focusing on the role of parish councillors would be welcome.

More liaising with officers on the LDF not just paperwork to be circulated but face to face discussions.

More understanding of correct procedures through meetings (minutes taken)

Most Parish Councillors have several years of experience and we able to handle the majority of applications.

None- not their jobs- unnecessary expenditure to implement.

Not in a position to say

not qualified to comment

Presumably you are asking about the skills and knowledge of the officials in Hereford Council. We do not feel able to comment, but we have not had cause to think that there has been evidence of a shortcoming. Sometimes we have felt that the attitude and interpersonal skills have been lacking but this has been the exception rather than the rule.

Role of Parish Councils

See Q4 (4)

Seminar on planning procedures and key criteria

Through HALC. although will need training in new regulations.

To understand the UDP

Training has been, and still is, non existent for Parish Councils

Training is on going

we all need updating on what is currently the accepted way for ward.

We prefer to rely on the expertise of the planning dept to make the right decisions.

what applications are acceptable and reasons for refusal (failure to support)

Appendix 6 – Comments Q6

As above & not waste tax payers money going against advice & subsequently losing appeals.

Better notification/information as to when /which applications will come before the relevant planning committee.

Clearer explanation of reasons behind decisions (on line access would be sufficient)

Decisions should not be made through delegated powers. The comments/opinions of parish councils (being at grass- root level) should not be dismissed without proper consideration.

Do the planning officers answer the question "Have you an interest to declare?" Do the planning committee members always answer the main questions about applications before voting ie. Does it inform to policies, any local issues, impact on adjoining properties, community benefits and any developer contribution.

Enforcement officers should be visibly accountable for enforcing planning decisions made.

From the occasional planning committee which I have attended, it would seem that some members are biased, uninformed or disinterested. Some are highly involved. Preparation and understanding of each case would appear vital.

Greater use of local (parish/town) councils and improved inter-action with councillors (county/parish/town), planners and clerks.

I do not have the information on this which would allow me to make any relevant comment.

I think the planning committee should **take notice of Parish Councils Opinions** and comments

Improved advertising of meetings better arrangements of floor space

Minutes of meetings taken.

More applications to be determined by planning committee rather than by individual planning officers.

More notice of meetings (hearings) please. Perhaps a list of meetings to all councils in advance

More notice to be taken of the parish council's views & comments. The planning officers seem to wield too much power.

No experience of attending HPC's meetings.

No issues at all. Always good prompt service

Non political

Non technical summaries of for example, environmental impact assessments or flood risk assessments would be very welcome as some of these documents can be inaccessible to members and the public.

None (8)

Northern Area planning meetings to be held in the North of the county - not

Hereford. There is an inconsistency in planning decisions inadequate training on your behalf.

Not happy about 'Heads of terms' payments being considered on single applications as the receipt of money connected with approving an application is open to misconception of neutrality.

Not in a position to judge, but site visits should be routine in conservation areas. not qualified to comment

Perhaps the structure could be explicit to us.

Planning officers should be available for appointments if necessary.

Speaks at site meetings. Make weight given to local opinion.

Take greater note of the views of Parish Councils.

The Parish councils are no longer advised on what dates they are being held.

The 3 minutes allowed to speak at planning meetings when controversial issues were discussed the time should be extended

The possibility of the **southern area committee occasionally meeting in the south** to enable more people to attend to see how the system works (It would also reduce the cost of mileage)

They need to follow the relevant policies as well as Parish Councils.

Three minutes is rarely an adequate time. More than one speaker should be allowed, and visual aids should be permitted.

Timescales to respond are sometimes 'tight'

Timing flexibility to avoid extra council meetings

We would like to see consistency of results.

When we have attended a public meeting (for example XXX) we have been satisfied that we were given a chance to make our points. However, our points were ignored.

We are concerned that too many decisions are delegated and do not come up to committee for airing. For example our agricultural house (refer Q1) was approved under delegated powers. A new house on a green field site in green belt should not have been approved in this way.

Would welcome having **an explanation when decisions are made contrary to the views of the Parish Council.**

Appendix 7 – Comments for Q7

Basic planning generally o.k. Enforcement areas to be very weak and/or ineffective

By and large, **constant communication** is needed to help explain the wide discrepancy in opinion between planners and the lay PCs

Communication could be improved. Officers do not follow through queries, complaints or items for an enforcement officer to look into. **Officers do not ring back** when requested to do so, or let us know results of items looked into.

For if yes, However the relationship has been **one sided with nothing coming from the planning service.**

I am very satisfied with the working relationship I have with Officers

In some cases the **planning committee ignores the parish council's views** and opinions which are fairly obtained for the benefit of the whole community.

Council 1 feel that **more notice needs to be taken of local people with local knowledge. Better communication, fast communication.**

Link to question 6

Local knowledge is generally ignored and attendance by the planning officers would improve this at planning meetings.

Need to be told why our comments are not taken into account in view of our local knowledge + empathy

Not entirely. The Parish council after makes detailed submissions on more complex applications, only to receive months later, a decision notice which does not appear to have been influenced in any way by their submission and without any accompanying explanation. It would be helpful if officers would remain in communication with the council during the planning process and **at the very best offer an explanation to why they have taken a different view at the end.** It would also be very helpful if planning officers would always be open to comments by Parish Councils and prepared at least to listen to these comments. While some officers are excellent in this respect, there are other officers inclined to brush aside queries or comments from the Parish Council on the basis that they are the professionals and the Parish Council we only amateurs. Once again this matter has been very fully dealt

with in the best consultation.

Officers have recently changed and it would be helpful to have regular surgeries to discuss area of mutual interest.

Planning officers always helpful & cooperative. v important to have matters explained thoroughly.

Some personalities are easier than others.

They do seem to be under pressure through lack of staff and time taken to respond to enquiries. Cannot do everything within 'remits' unless adequate staff.

They will not listen to parish councils who have good local knowledge.

Very

We need to have more interaction in the very first instance regarding large developments. Parish councils is an elected body and they should have more involvement in all large applications.

We would like the planning and enforcement staff to be more responsive to our requests and reports and we would like faster results from our enquiries and complaints. This may mean a change in priorities but probably means additional staff.

We are especially concerned about enforcement matters. We have two significant issues being investigated but progress is very slow. One issue is concerning the residential occupation of farm buildings and probably requires a visit to the site out of working hours which does seem to be a very unpopular activity for Hereford Council staff. If there is no intention to follow up our reports then there does need to be a meeting between HC planners and our Parish Councillors to resolve the issue.

When contacted, they are usually very helpful but there seems to be a lack of full collaboration, perhaps because of time constraints, which could be improved, there - by helping all concerned and lifting some of the burden from those most hard pressed. Working relationships are professional and satisfactory.

Appendix 8 – Comments for Q8

1. Feed back can be slow if applications are rejected

2. transparency by the planners and the invitation for local involvement are essential with UDP

Decisions to tax developers for beneficial purposes.

3. It sometimes seems that planners are fearful of an appeal or referral to the Inspectorate which is a political appointment. Compare this with the Judiciary and government driven ideas.

A summary of broad guide lines of what is acceptable ie approved square meter expansion etc. would be useful accepted insulation thickens etc.

Although have always found officers helpful Admin support seems to be lacking.

Decisions are very slow in being sent over and unless an officer is available no body to know what is going on.

As a Parish Council we are very much involved in enforcement. We are the unofficial eyes of Hereford Council. **Enforcement** is probably the most unattractive part of the planning workload and therefore should be staffed with suitable staff to deal with difficult issues and difficult people. It might be helpful to clarify the role of the Parish Council and the enforcement officers and reinforce the activity in both organisations. I have been asked to point out that we are in no way criticising individuals in any of our responses and any shortcomings are, we feel, the result of the policies and structure rather than the individuals.

Better consultation and listening to local councils **and take into account what they say** as we feel very un listened to. When this survey is complete we would like to hear the results and your findings.

From Q7, given our relative lack of resources, could more/better use be made of town/parish councils/clerks in the planning process? This may be especially so given the county's geographical spread and the difficulties for planners based in Hereford of being aware of all the resources and local geographical issues of the many and often remote locations around the county.

If the planning officer's **decision is contrary to the parish council's** comments an application to why the decision appears it ignore local opinion.

It would be helpful if the planners responded to letters in a reasonable time.

More notice **of long term possible developments.**

More transparency, classification, better communication involving Parish councils. We have no input into **large developments only when the application comes to the Parish council for comment.**

No (2)

Our parish council almost invariably makes a site visit to consider planning applications and makes its comments after much deliberation. I would like to see this effort acknowledged in the decision especially if this goes **against the recommendation of the Parish Council.**

Parish council has lost confidence in the ability of the planning officers + the committee and in their implementation of policy. and their **rejection of the parish council's opinions.**

Parishioners are expressing their concerns that some applications are taking more than 6 weeks to process

Perhaps more through checking of applications before sending out. We receive many applications with false statements or questions most completed.

Planning officers should be more professional accurate and not voice personal opinions when presenting to the committee.

Relevant Councillors should come to XXX Parish Council meetings.

Relevant parish councillors to be notified and invited to attend site meetings.

See 6 above (2)

Some times local councils + residents feel that planning officers do not appreciate 'local issues'.

That committee take more notice of input given from Parish Council's when local application is made within villages. Local knowledge regarding road, land, and other relevant local aspects should not be dismissed out of hand

Those planers are far more intent on implementing central government directives than listening to the concerns and views of attached residents.

The ability of Parish councils to leave an input at the time of decision making by the council planning committee.

The XXX council is unsure how the planning service will change in relation to the LDF, in particular what will be the relationship between a parish plan and the LDF.

Herefordshire Council should work with Parish Council during the period of change.

Also, how can we ensure that local people have more say **on major developments** that are planned for Hereford including 8000 houses and the ESG site- more participative forms of community involvement should be mandatory for larger developments? Applications should be accessible to parish councils in an electronic format compatible with data projection and this has the potential to save time and resources and there should be a facility to allow real time comments to be submitted by Parish councils as they consider the applications.

The main factor is the short time allowed for consultation. Earlier dispatch of papers with notice of applications by email would greatly help.

We are always given the impression that **the views of the Parish Councils are**

insignificant.

We consider that the service has improved over recent years

We have experienced planning applications sent to the wrong Parish and similarly received applications that are not ours. At Parish Council level the majority of councillors do not know a thing about planning. Education is a good thing but you can lead a horse to water - you can't make it drink.

Where planning applications are refused then resubmitted we are not made aware of the reasons for the original refusal.

Whilst it is felt that consultation about new applications could be handled efficiently by e-mail, there is concern that all document would then have to be downloaded and/or printed off on A4 size paper. The consideration of planning applications by parish councillors at open meetings necessitates all relevant documents and - most importantly - drawings being made available without recourse to the **use of magnifying glasses!** Councillors realise that the Government's moves towards e-planning might offer financial rewards for Local Planning Authorities, but they feel that this should not result in poorly resourced Parish Councils having to incur additional expenses. Responses via-email are preferred by this particular Parish Council, and it would be appreciated if case officers and others involved would always quote their e-mail addresses on any correspondence.

Would appreciate understanding how total mechanism works e.g timing process, which makes what decisions. When does appeal take over etc.

Yes. **Faster response to parish councils** after decisions has been made by officers or sub committees. Occasionally need extension to the 21 day consultation to fit around meetings.